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Letter dated 11 June 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith the national report of Belgium for the 2008 annual ministerial review to be held during high-level segment of the 2008 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council (see annex).

I would be grateful if you would circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the Economic and Social Council, under agenda item 2 (c) of the provisional agenda.

(*Signed*) Jan **Grauls**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 11 June 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

[Original: French]

National report of Belgium

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Executive Summary

1. Since the Rio Summit in 1992, Belgium has been producing **federal sustainable development plans** which are submitted to the federal Parliament and which give the strategic themes that underpin national sustainable development planning.

2. Belgian development cooperation seeks, as a matter of priority, to promote sustainable human development by focusing on the fight against poverty, based on a partnership approach and adhering to the criteria of relevance to development. It focuses on **five sectors** (health, education, agriculture, basic infrastructure, conflict prevention and strengthening of society) and **four cross-cutting themes** (gender, environment, social economy and rights of children). Currently, it is focused on **18 partner countries** and cooperates structurally with **21 international organizations**.

3. Belgium's activities with regard to the **environment and sustainable development** are structured around six priorities: sustainable management of water resources, control of desertification and forest degradation, protection and sustainable management of biodiversity, improved ecological management of urban and surrounding areas, reduction and prevention of the adverse effects of climate change.

4. The report on Belgian cooperation (2007) to Parliament on Belgium's efforts to **achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG)** outlines the progress made by partner countries in that regard and the Belgian contribution at the multilateral and bilateral level.

5. Belgium's official development assistance consists of activities at the federal level and at the level of the regions and communities.

6. Belgium contributes actively to the formulation of **joint positions of the European Union** as regards sustainable development and the environment. These contributions are the product of joint efforts by the federal and regional governments, meeting with civil society — represented by the **Federal Council for Sustainable Development** — to promote **multilateral coordination**.

7. Belgium participates in the work of the **Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)** and fully supports the latter's reform with a view, as a matter of priority, to implementation of the earlier commitments.

8. Belgium is following closely the discussions in New York on ways of strengthening **international environmental governance**. It attaches great importance to the gradual strengthening of UNEP and to enhancing coherence among the environmental conventions and in the operational activities of the United Nations.

9. Belgian cooperation contributes to the financing of the Montreal Protocol and of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It also contributes to the financing of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and thus participates in the assistance given to developing countries for the

establishment of legal instruments and intervention programmes so that they can comply with the **multilateral environmental agreements**.

10. Aside from its contributions to the environmental conventions and to GEF, Belgium contributes to the achievement of Goal 7 of the Millennium Development Goals at the multilateral level, primarily through **UNEP**. Belgium is one of the first donor countries to have embarked on a partnership agreement with UNEP which is trying to improve interactions among the various stakeholders in the programmes, inter alia, local governments, executing agencies, donors and recipient communities.

11. In the **European context**, Belgium is participating in the formulation of development programmes and projects. It is a member of the coordination group of the European Union Water Initiative (EUWI) and of the European Union Energy Initiative (EUEI) advisory group.

12. At the **bilateral level**, conservation of the environment and sustainable development are considered to be cross-cutting themes which must be systematically integrated into Belgium's cooperation activities. As regards Goal 7, bilateral cooperation is focused mainly on the areas of provision of drinking water and basic sanitation.

13. The **Belgian Survival Fund** seeks to increase food security for the poorest population groups. It adopts a multisectoral approach with a view to improving people's situation as regards their current needs without jeopardizing future generations, and thus acts as a precursor programme in respect of sustainable development.

14. On 7 March 2008, Belgium hosted an **international meeting on climate change and development** in Brussels. Those discussions should lead to specific proposals regarding development cooperation policies to deal with the challenge posed by climate change.

15. Belgian cooperation is helping to finance **multilateral activities** implemented by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), UNESCO and FAO as regards **protection and sustainable forest management in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**. It is also working on setting up a multi-donor trust fund for forest governance in DRC, to be managed by the World Bank. In 2007 and 2008, it participated in various multilateral events on the topic and, in 2007, it organized an international conference on sustainable forest management in the DRC. In the European context, the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan is the European Commission's response to the problem of illegal logging and trade in timber. It is envisaged that Belgium will finance the FLEGT pilot process in the DRC.

16. The aim of the **Tan Hoa, Lo Gom canal** project in Viet Nam, a **bilateral project** executed by Cooperation Technique Belge and the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City, was to clean up the canal, renovate neighbouring areas and resettle the population groups whose housing had been expropriated. Participation of the communities concerned, capacity-building and the strengthening of institutions were all essential elements in the execution of the project from the very beginning and they ensured its success, at least for a while. This project has already inspired other donors.

17. As for the **bilateral health and environment programme for the town of Esmeraldas in Ecuador**, it falls within the context of the new decentralized national health policy. The commitment of the municipality and the citizens, promotion of local culture, partnerships between public and private sectors and the support from the international community are continuing to play an essential role in this programme and are proving to be very helpful in promoting the success of the activities.

18. Lastly, the report summarizes the main **difficulties encountered and the good practices** implemented during the projects, and lists various **lessons and recommendations** for the future as regards general guidelines for Belgian development cooperation and at the operational level.

19. The **conclusion** places the activities of Belgian development cooperation in the context of the global challenges that have to be met and in the context of international cooperation.

Introduction

Belgium is pleased to be able to play an active role in the Annual Ministerial Review this year, inter alia, through this annual report. It would like to recall that, in its view, the Council is the ideal forum in which Member States can conduct a political discussion of the economic, social and environmental pillars of development. Belgium continues to strongly support the ongoing reform, which is designed to enhance the Council's legitimacy, credibility and efficiency, and the institution, at the World Summit of 2005, of the Annual Ministerial Review and the biennial Development Cooperation Forum.

1. General context of Belgium's contributions to the achievement of Goal 7

1.1. Sustainable development in Belgium since Rio

Following the Rio Summit of 1992 and implementation, at the international level, of the notion of sustainable development, Belgium has produced four editions of its federal sustainable development plan. Each five-year plan is drawn up by a working group headed by the Federal Planning Bureau, and is then submitted to the Federal Council for Sustainable Development, which consists of representatives of all the federal and regional ministries concerned and representatives of civil society. It is then discussed in the federal Parliament, which confirms the strategic themes underpinning the entire national system for sustainable development planning. After two years, an interim report is issued which evaluates the status of implementation of the latest plan.

1.2. The 1999 Act on development cooperation

According to the Act of 25 May 1999 concerning Belgian development cooperation, the primary goal of such cooperation is sustainable human development, which is to be achieved by fighting poverty based on a partnership approach and adhering to the criteria of relevance to development. It calls for concentrating on five sectors (basic health care; education and training; agriculture and food security; basic infrastructure; conflict prevention and strengthening of society, which also means supporting respect for human dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms) and four cross-cutting themes (rebalancing the rights and

opportunities of women and men; respect for the environment; social economy). The theme of children's rights was added in 2006. This same concern for concentration and efficiency prompted Belgium to reduce to 18 the number of countries it would partner in bilateral cooperation,[1] and to 21 the number of international organizations it would partner in multilateral cooperation.[2] It is worth noting that the sectors and themes chosen for concentration reflect the concerns of the major international conferences and commitments of the 1990s and are largely consistent with the Millennium Development Goals.

1.3. The Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals, which were agreed on following the September 2000 Summit in New York, were to give a new dimension to our development cooperation policy, by placing it within the context of the efforts of the international community as a whole to halve poverty in the world and to ensure a real improvement in the living conditions of millions of poor families by the year 2015.

Belgium welcomed the adoption of those goals at the time and it continues to attach the utmost importance to them. In so doing, it seeks to pay the greatest attention to the four following dimensions, which it believes to be directly linked to the Millennium Development Goals: (i) their global nature, which makes them an indivisible and interdependent whole since no one goal can be tackled in isolation; (ii) their quasi contractual value, which is the basis for a veritable partnership among all actors involved in their implementation; (iii) their particular significance in terms of policy guidance and perspective for actions to be undertaken without, however, leading to a reductionist mechanism; (iv) their value as a preferred instrument for raising awareness and a sense of responsibility among the many actors involved in their implementation, in the North as well as in the South. It is in that spirit that Belgium responded to the Council's invitation to attend the current Annual Ministerial Review, which is devoted to Goal 7.

The Act of 14 June 2005, concerning follow-up to Government activities regarding the Millennium Development Goals, calls for an annual report to Parliament. This report informs the Assembly of the status of the Millennium Development Goal campaign, both overall and for the 18 partner countries. It then describes what Belgium has done via the international organizations and what it has contributed at the bilateral level. The second report was submitted in October 2007. It refers more specifically, as regards Goal 7, to Belgium's participation in the international negotiations dealing with conservation of the environment; its financial contributions to the Global Environment Facility and to UNEP; and its initiatives as regards sustainable forest management in the DRC (see 5.1). In the portfolio of bilateral cooperation projects, the environment appears both as a specific sector and as a cross-cutting theme that must be reflected in each project.

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[1] These countries are: Algeria, Benin, Bolivia, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Palestine, Peru, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Viet Nam.

[2] These organizations are: FAO, CGIAR, GFATM, ICRC, ILO, IMO, OCHA, OHCHR, UNAIDS, UNCDF, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIFEM, UNRWA, WFP, WHO and the World Bank.

1.4. The strategic note on the environment of 2002

The Act of 1999 calls for the drafting of strategic sectoral and thematic notes to define the strategic policy options and political priorities of Belgian cooperation. The strategic note on the environment, which was issued in 2002, remains topical and identifies six priority aspects of Belgian activities:

- sustainable management of water resources;
- combating desertification and soil degradation;
- protection and sustainable management of forests;
- protection and sustainable management of biological diversity;
- improved ecological management of urban and surrounding areas;
- combating and reducing the effects of climate change.

The first priority aspect corresponds to target 10 of Goal 7, the next three to target 9 and the penultimate one to target 11; the last one is cross-cutting in nature.

1.5. Belgian development cooperation and Goal 7

This report focuses essentially on federal development cooperation activities within the context of Goal 7, namely, to ensure environmental sustainability. Federal cooperation functions via two entities, the Belgian Directorate-General for Development Cooperation, which is responsible for preparing strategies and negotiating programmes with partner countries and organizations, and Coopération Technique Belge (CTB), which is responsible solely for implementing bilateral programmes.

Belgian official development assistance activities include not only activities at the federal level but also activities financed by the regions and communities. The latter account for some 5 per cent of all Belgian official development assistance. The federated entities concerned have their own strategy and geographical and sectoral priorities. It should be noted that, in 2007, the Flemish region devoted 9 per cent of its official development assistance to sustainable development and environmental conservation. As to the Walloon region, since 2000, it has been working on a pilot project to combat desertification in Mauritania.

2. Belgium's participation in the formulation of sustainable development policies

2.1. National consultation and coordination mechanisms

2.1.1. Overall institutional framework: Belgium as a federal Stdte

As noted above (1.5), Belgium is a federal State, consisting of three communities and three regions. Accordingly, the country's administration is in the hands of several bodies — some federal, some federated — and they exercise their functions independently in their respective areas of competence. The federal State, regions and communities are all equal under the law and they therefore operate on an equal footing but in different areas. The rules regarding how these functions are divided are specified in the Constitution and in a series of special laws; there are also mechanisms in place to ensure that the various levels of power function smoothly and in a coordinated manner. This is also true in respect of sustainable development and the environment.

2.1.2. Consultation and coordination mechanisms

The arrangements established to ensure optimum coordination of Belgian sustainable development policy, pursuant to the Act of 5 May 1997, must be viewed in the above-mentioned context. That Act calls for the publication of a federal sustainable development plan[3] every four years and it also calls for a variety of instruments and institutions to be involved in the preparation of that plan, including, inter alia:

- the Interdepartmental Commission for Sustainable Development — consisting of representatives of the federal, regional and community governments and the Bureau of Planning — whose overall mission is to coordinate;
- the Federal Department for Programming "sustainable development", which is responsible for preparing and coordinating the execution of federal policy on sustainable development;
- the Bureau of Planning and its task force on sustainable development;
- the Federal Council for Sustainable Development, an advisory body in which civil society and academic circles are also represented. It can render opinions on sustainable development and development cooperation, either at the request of the federal Government or on its own initiative.

2.2. Consultation and coordination mechanisms at the European and international level

Belgium contributes regularly to the formulation of joint European Union (EU) positions on sustainable development and the environment, which are presented at meetings of the Commission on Sustainable Development, governing councils of the multilateral organizations concerned and at conferences of parties to the multilateral agreements on the environment.

At the European level, its contributions are submitted and upheld within the EU Working Party on International Environmental Issues (WPIEI). The latter formulates, on the basis of contributions from member States, the European positions for UNEP, CSD and discussions on sustainable development in other organs of the United Nations (such as the General Assembly and the Economic Commission for Europe).

The Belgian positions put forward at the European level are always the product of close coordination between the actors concerned. These contributions are the fruit of joint work by all the relevant departments (environment, sustainable development, foreign affairs, development cooperation) of the federal government and of the regional and community governments meeting at the initiative of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs for purposes of multilateral coordination. Civil society, represented by a spokesman from the Federal Council for Sustainable Development also participates in this monthly consultation.

As for international policy on sustainable development, it is again the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs which is responsible for Belgian coordination. Specifically, this involves monthly meetings on sustainable development (COORMULTI). As regards international environmental policy, a separate permanent structure for coordination, the Committee to Coordinate International

[3] In the preparatory phase this plan is subject to broad public consultation.

Environmental Policy was created by a cooperation agreement between the federal Government and the regions.

2.3. Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)

Belgium participates actively in the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development and fully endorses the mission outlined at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, i.e. to focus more closely on implementing previous commitments by conducting a biennial assessment of progress achieved and remaining challenges. Belgium was also one of the founders of the 10-year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (Marrakesh Process) in 2003; it has contributed to the Process and has closely monitored its implementation since the beginning.

2.4. International environmental governance

Belgium closely monitors the discussions in New York on the strengthening of international environmental governance. It attaches great importance to the progressive strengthening of UNEP and to enhanced harmonization of environmental conventions and United Nations operational activities. It is no longer appropriate to manage environmental problems through a United Nations programme that depends on voluntary contributions; to split United Nations activities among numerous bodies; or to govern those activities through multiple conventions, with little harmonization.

3. Participation of Belgium in the operationalization of sustainable development policies

3.1. Multilateral dimension

3.1.1. Multilateral environmental agreements — Global Environment Facility (GEF)

Belgian cooperation contributes to the financing of the following four multilateral conventions, to which Belgium is a signatory: the Montreal Protocol, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. It also contributes to the financing of the Global Environment Facility, thereby providing assistance to developing countries for the establishment of legal instruments and intervention programmes that enable them to implement international environmental agreements relating to climate change, conservation of biodiversity, protection of the ozone layer, pollution of international waters, soil degradation — primarily desertification and deforestation — and the elimination of persistent organic pollutants.

In each of these areas, Belgium aims to assist the developing countries in managing situations which are often caused mainly by the developed countries but affect the developing countries the most.

The main obstacle to the effective implementation of multilateral environmental agreements is their complexity and interconnection. It is particularly important to encourage synergies in implementing such agreements in the field. GEF is the ideal mechanism in that respect, as it provides funds for the development of "multifocal" projects that aim to ensure the simultaneous and complementary implementation of several agreements.

Such synergies can also be achieved by systematically integrating the objectives of environmental agreements in national development plans and poverty reduction strategies and their budgets. Belgium participates substantively in this approach through its financing of the joint UNEP and UNDP Poverty and Environment Initiative and its funding of university research on greening poverty reduction strategy papers.

3.1.2. Partnership with UNEP

In addition to GEF and various multilateral environmental agreements, Belgium contributes to the achievement of Goal 7 primarily through UNEP. A 2004 strategy paper between the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and UNEP, which was updated in 2008, sets forth the main principles of the cooperation between Belgium and UNEP, as follows:

- Affirmation of UNEP's important normative and catalytic role in helping Governments take decisions on environmental issues;
- Support for the strengthening of UNEP's scientific base;
- Support for UNEP's role in coordinating United Nations environmental activities;
- The need to provide technology support and strengthen the capacity of developing countries to implement multilateral environmental agreements (Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building);
- Support for mainstreaming environmental aspects in national development plans and poverty reduction strategies;
- Support for strengthening cooperation with other United Nations agencies, particularly UNDP, UN-Habitat, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Operational cooperation between Belgium and UNEP has evolved significantly over the last five years. In the past, financing was provided on a case-by-case basis, in accordance with UNEP's proposals; there were a large number of small interventions, all of which were funded from annual budgets. Since 2004, programmes have been formulated to cover a restricted number of activities during a four-year period. The 2004-2007 programme included the strengthening of UNEP's scientific base; protection of the environment in coastal areas; and the inclusion of environmental aspects in national development plans and poverty reduction strategies. These activities will be continued in the next four-year programme; however, it will focus more closely on national and local capacity-building.

Since 2005, UNEP has encouraged donor countries to establish partnership agreements in order to ensure more predictable financing; greater coherence with UNEP's programme of work; and improved harmonization among the different actors. Belgium was one of the first donor countries to do so. The purpose is not only to establish a common results-based approach but also to enhance interaction among the different stakeholders: local governments, executing agencies, donors, recipient communities and so forth. The midterm evaluation of the Belgium-UNEP partnership, which was published in 2006, revealed the following:

- Increased efficiency compared to the traditional fragmented project-by-project approach;
- Greater predictability of financial resources as a result of multi-year financing commitments;
- Need to focus on areas in which UNEP has a comparative advantage;
- Risk of high transaction costs for projects involving several components and a large number of countries;
- Need to improve cooperation among the different UNEP divisions working on the implementation of a particular programme;
- Need for multilateral organizations, including the World Bank, to coordinate at the country level on capacity-building;
- Need to achieve the implementation of the UNEP-UNDP memorandum of understanding.

The above-mentioned observations and recommendations led to a number of operational conclusions concerning collaboration between Belgian development cooperation activities and UNEP and revealed the need to:

- Develop a smaller number of programmes addressing a limited number of countries, including bilateral cooperation partners;
- Appoint one division to coordinate programmes being implemented by several divisions, with a view to improving communication and the exchange of information;
- Draw up project documents that include an intervention strategy with indicators, a timetable of activities and a schedule of expenditures;
- Conclude operational memoranda of understanding with implementing partners, particularly UNDP;
- Have Belgium participate in meetings of strategic bodies and follow-up meetings;
- Consult with other donors on monitoring and the harmonization of reporting modalities.

3.2. European dimension

As previously mentioned, Belgium actively participates in the European countries' collective development cooperation efforts[1] and in the elaboration of European Union programmes and aid projects for partner countries, particularly the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) covered under the Cotonou Agreement. It also participates in regional cooperation activities. Belgium is an active member of the European Union Water Initiative (EUWI) coordinating committee (formerly called the EUWI Steering Group) and of the EUWI Working Group for Africa. One of the main results of the Initiative was the allocation of 500 million euros for the establishment and operation of the ACP-UE Water Facility. The Facility has already made it possible to fund synergies in the field between access to drinking water and basic sanitation services; Belgian development

cooperation has directly enabled the establishment of synergies in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania and Rwanda.

Belgium is also a member of the advisory group of the EU Energy Initiative (EUEI), which has been allocated 220 million euros by the ACP-EU Energy Facility. This Facility facilitates the financing, within the framework of synergies and partnerships, of access to energy services in rural as well as urban areas, with a view to achieving poverty eradication and sustainable development.

In the run-up to the June European Council and important international conferences in Accra, New York and Doha, the European Commission issued a communication concerning the European Union's role as a global development partner.[4] As indicated in that communication and in the European Council's exchanges and conclusions on the matter, Belgium will participate in the European effort to accelerate and strengthen progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and Goal 7 in particular, through a comprehensive approach and a multi-stakeholder partnership. In its elaboration of European assistance programmes and projects, Coopération Technique Belge consistently takes into account the fact that, in their different components, the environmental and sustainable development issues reflected in Goal 7 also constitute cross-cutting issues. Each strategy document for the ACP countries therefore includes an environmental profile, within the framework of the tenth European Development Fund for 2008-2013, which came into effect on 1 January 2008.

3.3. Bilateral dimension

With respect to Belgian bilateral cooperation activities, conservation of the environment and sustainable development are also considered cross-cutting issues which must be reflected systematically in the development and implementation of all development assistance interventions.

While multilateral cooperation focuses more closely on projects relating to target 9 of Goal 7, i.e. "Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes; reverse loss of environmental resources", direct and indirect bilateral cooperation focuses primarily on access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation (target 10) and on the improvement of the lives of slum-dwellers (target 11).

This report later presents detailed case studies of two direct bilateral Belgian initiatives relating to targets 10 and 11, in Viet Nam and Ecuador respectively. Water resource management is also one of the priorities of Belgian cooperation in other partner countries, such as Morocco, Algeria and Senegal. Other direct bilateral assistance projects[5] currently being implemented include a dozen programmes and projects aimed at the achievement of target 9; approximately 30 projects for target 10; and another dozen for target 11. Although the projects cover diverse geographical areas, special attention is given to regions in North and sub-Saharan Africa and Central Africa in particular.

[4] http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/michel/Policy/key_documents.

[5] This does not include programmes and projects that have already been implemented or are currently being prepared.

In 2007, 8 per cent of the resources of indirect bilateral cooperation (NGOs and universities) was allocated to activities directly related to the achievement of Goal 7, targets 9, 10 and 11.

3.4. An original sustainable initiative: the Belgian Survival Fund

The Belgian Survival Fund is an original initiative that combines bilateral and multilateral cooperation instruments. The objective of the programme is to improve the food security of the poorest population groups, primarily in sub-Saharan Africa. Between 1999 and 2007, 89 projects were implemented by 24 partner organizations, including multilateral organizations, Belgian NGOs and Coopération Technique Belge.

The Fund was established on 9 February 1999 by an Act which guarantees the Fund the sum of 250 million euros over approximately 10 years. These funds come directly from the National Lottery. A working group of parliamentarians conducts an annual assessment of the progress achieved, evaluations and proposed policy guidelines to improve programme performance.

This pioneering programme takes a holistic and comprehensive multisectoral approach which aims to address the multidimensional causes of poverty and food insecurity. With respect to the environmental aspect of development, the Fund promotes the sustainable management of natural resources through the conservation of water and soil, the rehabilitation of degraded land, small-scale reforestation and so forth. The Fund is an ideal sustainable development programme in that it focuses on human, economic, social, institutional and environmental aspects and strives to meet current needs without compromising future generations.

The overall assessment of the 1999-2007 programmes revealed that linking food security and poverty eradication strategies complicates the various partners' tasks. A sharper distinction should therefore be drawn between the two strategies.

4. International meeting on climate change and development

On 7 March 2008, Belgian development cooperation actors hosted an international meeting on climate change and development cooperation under the chairmanship of Jean-Pascal van Ypersele, who is a professor at the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium) and Vice-Chairman of Working Group II of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Her Royal Highness Princess Astrid of Belgium attended the meeting.

The meeting, which was organized by the Ministry of Development Cooperation, served as a forum for a wide range of actors to discuss climate change as a new challenge in development cooperation. Speakers included representatives of Belgian cooperation bodies, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, UNDP, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, the European Commission, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Centre on Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness based in The Hague, the WWF and the universities of Gent, Brussels and Louvain-la-Neuve. Participants included a broad spectrum of representatives from civil society, NGOs, the diplomatic corps, parliaments, federal and regional administrations, bilateral and multilateral development agencies, universities, research institutes, the private sector and unions.

Climate change has become a major challenge for development cooperation because it jeopardizes the economic and social development of developing countries and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, particularly Goal 1, target 1, i.e. to reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day and Goal 7, i.e. to ensure environmental sustainability.

Moreover, climate change is likely to have a considerable impact on development cooperation projects and their sustainability. According to a recent study conducted by the World Bank, 55 per cent of its projects are climate-sensitive and at least 25 per cent are at high risk of being negatively affected by climate change, yet only 2 per cent are tested for climate sensitivity.

In light of these findings, the meeting was designed to foster a broad exchange of views, ideas and field experience on such topics as:

- Mitigation of climate change: Increasing developing countries' capacity to absorb greenhouse gases (with speeches on topics such as forestry projects in Central Africa) and taking account of associated emissions in projects involving the energy sector or technology transfer;
- Adaptation to climate change: Improving planning by greening the poverty reduction strategy papers;
- Overview of Belgian cooperation activities and initiatives in progress.

The meeting enjoyed the close collaboration of Belgian development cooperation and the Federal Council for Sustainable Development, the authority responsible for advising the Belgian Government on sustainable development policy, and ongoing consultation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Environment and with CTB, the agency in charge of implementing development cooperation programmes.

As part of its broader aim to promote cooperation for sustainable development, the meeting contributed to ongoing discussions on including climate change in Belgium's development cooperation policy, and will be followed up in a report by Professor Jean-Pascal van Ypersele. The report, which is to be completed by the end of June 2008, will contain recommendations for the Ministry for Development Cooperation with a view to better and further integrating climate change and the impact thereof on developing countries in Belgian development cooperation policy and projects.

Pending issuance of the report, it is evident that Belgian cooperation policy should be particularly careful to avoid certain risks and shortcomings identified in other countries, including:

- Perception of climate change as an international topic of negotiation within the province of agencies specializing in environmental issues;
- Lack of awareness that climate change is a major challenge for development in general, and even more so for specific projects (e.g. impact of climate risks on expected outcomes of development projects, vulnerability to climate change of the communities and/or ecosystems associated with such projects, and the impact of development projects on the vulnerability of communities and/or ecosystems to climate change);

- Lack of qualified personnel able to grasp the relationship both between climate analysis and climate policy, and between general development policy and specific development cooperation projects;

- Inadequacy of procedures and tools to evaluate the links between climate change and development projects at various levels (ex ante assessment, follow-up, ex post assessment) and for different project categories (classified according to their climate sensitivity).

On the basis of a specific premise, and taking into account the particular aspects of Belgian development cooperation policy (e.g. characteristics and location of partner countries), and, within the framework of the European Union's initiatives and overall strategy, Belgian development cooperation agencies will have to:

- Devise a coherent strategy for mainstreaming climate change in the various channels of development assistance, including bilateral, multilateral and indirect cooperation and special programmes;

- Examine a series of specific proposals in such areas as personnel training, access to readily usable climate information, stronger ties with the scientific community, and the development of a methodological framework (e.g. entry points, toolbox and checklists).

5. *Case studies: Initiatives in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Viet Nam and Ecuador*

This section provides detailed information about a multilateral programme aimed at contributing to the achievement of target 9 of MDG 7 ("Reverse loss of environmental resources") and two bilateral urban programmes carried out by CTB, and aimed at contributing to the achievement of target 11 of Goal 7 ("Achieve significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers, by 2020").

5.1. *Belgium's contribution to forest management in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*

Belgian development cooperation activities finance or help to finance several multilateral initiatives for the conservation and sustainable development of forests in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Protecting the integrity of tropical forests is not only necessary for the development of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the entire subregion of the Congo Basin, but an essential priority for preserving biodiversity and reducing global warming. Three programmes have been established to improve forest management. A programme headed by WWF aims to improve forest legislation, help model development planning for forest concessions and support conservation and development in a buffer zone of the Luki Biosphere Reserve in the Congo Basin. FAO provides support for modelling community forestry and UNESCO helps fund the monitoring of protected area management and the training of forestry officials at ERAIFT.[6]

In addition to funding these programmes, Belgium is involved in several multi-donor initiatives.

[6] ERAIFT: *Ecole régionale post-universitaire d'aménagement et de gestion intégrés des forêts et territoires tropicaux* (Regional School on Integrated Management of Tropical Forests and Territories).

In 2006, it actively supported the establishment of a multi-donor trust fund for forest governance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to be managed by the World Bank. The objectives of the trust fund, which is a joint initiative by the European Commission, Belgium and France, are to improve forest governance and promote sustainable forestry and, more specifically, to support implementation of the Forestry Code and of the priority reform agenda of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. After considerable delay in establishing the fund, Belgium welcomes the World Bank's announcement that the fund will be operational as of mid-July 2008.

As part of its development cooperation initiatives, Belgium also organized an international conference on sustainable forest management in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Brussels on 26 and 27 February 2007, with the support of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the international community, specifically, the European Commission, the World Bank, the United Kingdom and France. The conference brought together stakeholders of the Congolese forests with a view to examining the current situation and discussing the sustainable and innovative management of forests and appropriate financing mechanisms to enable forests to become a factor of sustainable human development. The conclusions of the conference were incorporated into the *Declaration of Brussels*.

One major outcome of the conference was the strengthening of the multi-donor trust fund for forest governance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo through additional contributions from the United Kingdom and Luxembourg. A second contribution was made by Belgium with a view to establishing two additional trust funds for protected areas and conservation concessions, respectively. Funding commitments have also been made by Germany and the Netherlands. Furthermore, a Forest Support Unit for the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been established within the Coopération Technique Belge.

On 14 April 2007, a round-table meeting entitled "Towards a New Vision for the Forest of the Congo" was held in Washington, D.C. It was co-hosted by the Governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Belgium, and the President of the World Bank.

At the request of the United Kingdom Department for International Development and the World Bank, Belgian development cooperation services were actively involved in organizing a Chatham House event in London, in December 2007, on "Alternative Models and Finance Mechanisms for Sustainable Forest Use in the Democratic Republic of the Congo". The event was expected to result in the development — and funding — of five projects, including the establishment of a Protected Areas Trust Fund for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A second Chatham House event will be held in Kinshasa on 23 and 24 June 2008.

Finally, during the 2007 European Development Days, held in Lisbon, on the theme "Will Climate Change Development", Belgium took the initiative to organize a side event entitled "Avoided Deforestation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Combat Climate Change". Belgian development cooperation activities in this area focus on promoting operational partnerships and establishing sustainable financing mechanisms based on compensation for environmental services involving forests in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Also in Europe, the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan is the European Commission's concrete response to the problem of illegal logging and trade in timber. At the invitation of the Commission and at the request of the Government of

the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Belgium will finance the FLEGT pilot process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

5.2. Urban renewal in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam

Ho Chi Minh City — Ho Chi Minh City is the largest Vietnamese city in terms of surface area, surpassing even Hanoi, the capital of Viet Nam; it is also the country's economic centre. Having undergone rapid development, it, like many other cities in South-East Asia, is faced with significant and poorly controlled rural-urban migration. Officially, some six million people are said to live in Ho Chi Minh City, but that does not include the approximately two million unregistered inhabitants. The urban growth rate of the city is 4.2 per cent annually, with a national average of 3 per cent. Poor management of that growth has led to a widening divide between rich and poor.

The city itself resembles a patchwork, made up of an elaborate network of canals and rivers that, combined, reach a length of nearly 100 kilometres. Although these navigable routes cutting across the urban tissue once represented a practical transport network, they are now mainly used by residents to dispose of garbage and wastewater.

Tan Hoa-Lo Gom Project — The Tan Hoa-Lo Gom canal is one of the most polluted canals in Ho Chi Minh City. The canal basin is home to around 700,000 inhabitants, many of whom live in wretched conditions. Their socio-economic situation is pretty dire for the urban infrastructure, is far from adequate and pollution is horrendous in the area. In light of such conditions, Belgian development cooperation has invested since 1998 in a project for urban renewal and the sanitation of the Tan Hoa-Lo Gom canal. While it has been the subject of some controversy, the project is nonetheless a spectacular success, its main goal having been to improve the living conditions of people residing along the canal and to build the capacity of the authorities and local communities in terms of waste management and the reduction of urban poverty. The project was carried out by the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee and Coopération Technique Belge; for 10 years, the two partners worked together at a local management unit, PMU415, with a team of some 25 staff. The project cost a total of €20 million, half of which was supplied by the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee, and the other half by the Coopération Technique Belge. Active involvement, development of socio-economic activities, and capacity-building and strengthening of institutions were key elements in the project's success.

From the beginning, the project adopted a holistic approach. The residents were consulted and the local authorities were actively involved. In the first phase of the project, socio-economic surveys and technical studies were conducted by independent experts. The project was supported by a team of social workers and educators specializing in environmental issues; microcredit groups and special event groups were also established.

Residents presented with new housing options — In order to widen the canal for transport purposes, a significant number of informal dwellings along the canal and on the canal itself had to be demolished. Three different options were given to the inhabitants. Firstly, apartments were built near the canal close to where the families had been living. Small and affordable, the apartments could be expanded by building a mezzanine. There was also a large public space suitable for social or

commercial activities and a market to help ensure that residents maintained a stable income, while stimulating the community life of the neighbourhood.

The second option offered was the assignment of lots to some families, with an underground connection to water and electricity supplies in an area about 10 kilometres away. The residents would be able to apply for construction loans via a construction fund established as part of the project. At the people's request, an elementary school was built instead of the market originally planned by the project.

Finally, following delays in obtaining the necessary authorizations, a third option was made available to other families, who were able to obtain financial compensation to build their new homes.

It was not necessary for all the residents affected by the widening of the canal to move out. The area near the canal was designated for urban renewal, with access to running water and electricity provided for a large number of dwellings. The sewage system and roadways were rehabilitated and a programme was launched for the construction of septic tanks. Albeit informal, the neighbourhood provides a medium-term solution to housing problems. Construction work on the local infrastructure has in fact motivated a number of residents to renovate their own homes.

Waste management — In the past, one out of every three families threw their rubbish directly into the water. Five tonnes of refuse made its way into the canal every day and had to be removed by municipal collection services. The most destitute residents refused to pay the refuse collection fee and left their trash on the street.

The project's management unit has succeeded in improving waste management in four neighbourhoods. To do this, a team of professional social workers was hired to play the role of mediator between refuse collectors, residents and the authorities. Negotiations resulted in the establishment of a cooperative of 30 refuse collectors. The re-organization of refuse collection has improved efficiency and increased profits for collectors, who have signed contracts with 92 per cent of families living in the district. A temporary waste drop-off station, named the *Ba Lai Small Transfer Station*, was built: collectors tip refuse directly into containers and sort the refuse for recycling; refuse is then transported directly to the city landfill.

However, refuse is refuse. An initiative was therefore launched to raise environmental awareness in 17 schools in the district. The goal is to reduce the amount of waste produced and to promote recycling; each year, environmental workshops are held for students.

Wastewater treatment — On 30 March 2006, the project management unit opened the first wastewater treatment plant in Ho Chi Minh City. When operating at full capacity this plant can treat the wastewater of up to 200,000 inhabitants. The plant has two parallel systems, each of which uses oxidation ponds to treat wastewater in a manner that is natural and respectful of the environment. This is the first time this technique is used in Viet Nam. The water leaving the plant generally meets the standards required of surface water and the plant produces no unpleasant smells or sounds. The buffer area surrounding the plant's reservoirs has been laid out as a green space, providing neighbouring residents with quality space.

Secret of success — Participation and capacity-building were, from the start, essential elements in the execution of the more technical components of the project. This cross-cutting approach adopted throughout the project explains why the population and the authorities supported the proposed activities and also explains the sustainable nature of the activities.

A team of social workers met with the inhabitants with a view to finding out what their concerns were. The aim was to create a space conducive to finding appropriate solutions for the inhabitants' needs. It was also necessary to take advantage of the activities in order to improve living conditions in all districts. The team faced an uphill task, for previous experience with participation at the neighbourhood level had cooled the enthusiasm of some residents, prompting them to be somewhat distrustful. The team had to show great understanding and conviction in order to overcome the initial scepticism.

The attitude of the municipal authorities was also vitally important. Improving the living conditions of a group of poor migrants, many of them illegal, threatened to attract more illegal migrants.

Adaption on a larger scale — That project has inspired other donors and the municipality itself. The World Bank's Viet Nam Urban Upgrading Project (with a budget of 400 million euros) was inspired directly by the Belgian bilateral pilot project. Participation by the inhabitants and intervention by teams of social workers in the expropriation process are now commonplace in Ho Chi Minh City. The various possible techniques for housing poor families — division into small lots, apartments, buildings with several floors — are now part of the public debate.

In order to deal with refuse, the municipality is planning to create 25 additional dumps with financing from the Asian Development Bank. Wastewater treatment plants using lagoons are considered an excellent alternative to more traditional or more natural systems. Moreover, the toolbox designed for interactive training in the environment is today being used in all primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City, and the Ministry of Education plans to extend its use throughout the country.

The experience gained by the project is also being put to good use in other cities, including abroad. Members of the Kampala city council recently visited the Ho Chi Minh City project, since Kampala is currently trying to clean up its slums with the support of Belgian bilateral cooperation. The meetings between officials of the two cities resulted in an exchange of knowledge and of good practices. The Ugandans were able to see, on the spot, that consultation and participation were key to the success of such projects.

Outcome — An in-depth final evaluation of the project was carried out in March 2006. The evaluation team concluded that the project would have to be monitored very carefully so as to have a better idea of its impact over the longer term. It is likely that, given the speed at which Ho Chi Minh City is growing, the project will prove even more relevant than it was when it was first designed. Although there are limits, of course, it would seem to be worth looking more closely into such pilot projects in order to make the most of their success.

5.3. Health and environment programme for the town of Esmeraldas in Ecuador

The town of Esmeraldas is the capital of Esmeraldas province in the north-west of Ecuador. If one includes the neighbouring rural areas, Esmeraldas has a population of some 170,000 inhabitants, of whom 100,000 — mostly of Afro-Ecuadorian origin — live in the city.

Esmeraldas was long isolated from the rest of the country, and was accessible only by sea. The road network was developed in the 1970s. Since power was concentrated in Quito — the capital — the town's mandate was limited, provincial institutions were weak and corruption was rampant. Esmeraldas was one of the poorest regions of the country and faced many health and environmental problems associated with poverty.

Ecuador is currently engaged in a process of decentralization and modernization, the aim being to delegate tasks, responsibilities and resources to subnational entities. In that context, the municipality of Esmeraldas has developed a local development plan (2002-2012) and a local Agenda 21, both of which were prepared with the participation of the population. Studies were carried out by UNDP, UN-Habitat and Belgium and subsequently discussed with the people. This led to the preparation of a list of priorities for strengthening local institutions involved in the environment, culture, urban sanitation, treatment of solid wastes, the health system, improvement of public spaces and reforestation of the surrounding areas. The participatory aspect of this municipal planning exercise has now been institutionalized through biannual citizens' assemblies that monitor progress. In June 2007, all the contributors signed an urban pact in order to anchor the process.

The municipality wants to be able to report back to the population and is trying to take the local cultural context into account. The international development partners have been invited to support this planning process. Belgium has decided to support the health and environment sector. Its support focuses on the priorities of the local development plan and is fully consistent with the local structures and policies. The main elements of the programme are:

- Development of local institutional capacity

This component seeks to improve management of health services and hospital waste and to strengthen the municipal departments dealing with hygiene, the environment, local development and planning. Special attention is given to the control of tropical diseases and to HIV/AIDS prevention.

- Strengthening of social participation

This includes popular participation in prevention as regards health and the environment, community investment and organization of hospital wards. Particular attention is given to vulnerable groups.

- Improvement of the urban environment, including removal of solid waste, of wastewater, and water management and infrastructure

The improvements have been impressive. Esmeraldas did not have a sewer system, communicable diseases were a constant threat and HIV/AIDS was spreading rapidly.

The town was regarded as one of the dirtiest and unhealthiest in the region. Today, 60 per cent of the sewage system is in place. Other achievements include

construction of water collection systems, access to drinking water for 80 per cent of the population in urban areas, and collection of solid waste for 85 per cent of the population. Although the poverty rate has gone down and control of communicable diseases has improved, poverty and disease are still major challenges.

One secret of this success is the strong control exerted by the municipality over a programme that the population "took over". Under such circumstances, development assistance can apply international good practices fully and make them part of the ongoing process.

6. *Summary of difficulties encountered, good practices and recommendations for the future*

The first findings and recommendations to come out of the March 2008 meeting on climate change and development are referred to above, under section 4. Below are some comments and recommendations based upon a review of the strategies and priorities of Belgian cooperation as regards sustainable development and management of the environment and its various contributions in the said areas, under bilateral, European and multilateral activities.

6.1. *General trends*

Difficulties encountered:

- Unequal geographical and social distribution of Millennium Development Goal results at the national level
- Difficulties in implementing multilateral environmental agreements due to their complexity and the many links between them

Recommendations:

- Complete reporting on the degree to which Millennium Development Goals have been attained, by specific on-the-spot impact assessments
- Promote synergies between multilateral environmental agreements in the on-the-spot implementation thereof
- Systematic integration of the goals of those agreements in development and poverty-reduction strategies and budgets relating thereto
- Better coherence between these agreements and United Nations operational activities
- Support for strengthening collaboration among United Nations agencies concerned

6.2. *Operational level*

Difficulties encountered:

- Risk of delays in mobilizing funds by multi-donor programmes
- Local authorities' distrust of large-scale projects that are steered from a distance
- Complex bureaucracy in the context of multi-agency activities

Effective practices:

- Comprehensive and cross-cutting approach to development
- Promotion of dialogue and partnership among communities, authorities and executing agencies
- Strengthening of institutions and of the capacities of the administrative services concerned
- Development of socio-economic activities and awareness relating to rehabilitation and sanitation programmes
- Social work to facilitate dialogue among the various development actors and beneficiaries
- Pragmatism in choosing solutions based on the real situation and actual possibilities

Recommendations:

- Need for post-project/programme monitoring in order to assess sustainability and results over the longer term
- Pursuit of a management approach that is increasingly focused on results
- Organization of consultations among donors and other actors/beneficiaries at the level of monitoring and harmonization of reporting modalities
- Creation of conditions tailored to the most vulnerable population groups so that they can help themselves to improve their quality of life

7. *Conclusions and outlook for the future*

The Millennium Development Goals will continue to be the common thread running through all Belgian development cooperation activities. Although it already took steps to that end in 2008, Belgium will have to redouble its efforts in order to attain the goal it has set itself of devoting 0.7 per cent of its GDP to official development assistance by 2010. Belgium also endorses the terms of the Paris Declaration with regard to ownership, harmonization, alignment, results and mutual accountability. It also supports an approach advocating division of labour among the various donors, including within the context of the European Union.

The experience described in the present report amply demonstrates that progress towards sustainable development, the theme of Goal 7, also presupposes a persistent effort based on a clearly stated desire on the part of the authorities concerned and supported by a structured and willing involvement on the part of the population groups concerned. The only way to achieve sustainable development is by working in close synergy with all the partners.

Development cooperation can no longer be considered in isolation. It must increasingly be viewed as part of overall international activities covering a range of areas such as, for example, international security, globalization, management of migration, the growing pressure on resources, particularly water resources and the challenge posed by climate change. In all these areas, Belgium will try to ensure that its development cooperation activities continue to focus, as a matter of priority, on the fight against poverty; the poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSP) prepared

by its partner countries continue to be valuable reference documents in that respect. Indeed, poverty is a major contributing factor to the difficulties and challenges referred to above. It would also be a good idea to extend integration of the "sustainable development" dimension to all activities in order to make sure that the expected progress does not come at the expense of future generations.